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Missionary Herald
Mar. 1838

Indians West of the Rocky Mountains.

EXTRACTS FROM A LETTER OF MR. GRAY, DATED JAN. 10, 1838.

Reinforcement of the Mission.

THE return of Mr. Gray from the mission on the waters of the Columbia river, in company with a delegation of Flat Head Indians, who were unhappily murdered by a band of hostile Indians before reaching the frontiers of Missouri, was mentioned at page 476 of the last volume. The object of Mr. Gray, in leaving the field of his labors, as well as that of the Indians who commenced the journey with him, was to obtain additional missionaries and teachers, whom he hoped that his statements relative to those remote but interesting tribes, together with the earnestness of some of their own number who had come so far to present their claim, would enable him to secure. His expectation was to return and conduct the party to their contemplated field of labor in the course of the ensuing spring.

In view of the statements made by Mr. Gray, in addition to those of Mr. Spalding relative to his reception among the Nez Perces, the Committee have voted to send four missionaries and teachers to accompany Mr. G. on his return. The state of the treasury would not permit them to send a larger reinforcement; nor would they, indeed, have felt themselves justified in incurring the expense required even for this, had not the circumstances of the case appeared peculiarly urgent. The persons composing this party are expected to start from the western frontier of the State of Missouri about the end of April, and to proceed on horses across the prairies and mountains, about 2,000 miles to Wallawalla.

But this company, though as large as the present state of the funds of the Board will permit, will be very far from supplying all the tribes which are not only open to religious teachers, but strongly desirous of obtaining them. There seems not to be any good reason to doubt, that, in almost any of the tribes mentioned below, missionaries, teachers, and other lay assistants would find a confiding and docile people and an interesting field of labor and usefulness. Probably the present time is the most favorable for introducing a knowledge of Christianity and the useful arts among these tribes. A few years more may bring them under other influences, which shall speedily accomplish the work of debasement and ruin.

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It will be seen below that Mr. Gray brings to view openings for above fifty families, which might be composed of preachers, school-teachers, and intelligent farmers and mechanics—probably about an equal number of each would be desirable. How long must it be before these benighted and wretched tribes—more desirous of christian instruction and aid than perhaps any other people—shall have the gospel sent through all their mountains and valleys?

Openings and Demand for Additional Missionaries.

I cannot expect in this letter to give any thing like all the reasons we have for asking, in behalf of the several tribes, for teachers. You have been informed of our reception thus far among the Indians; at least so far as it relates to the Kayuses and Nez Perces. That Mr. Spalding and Doct. Whitman want assistance at each of their stations is obvious and needs no reasons from me. The Flat Heads are now without a teacher. They have asked with tears, for the living teacher, and in their efforts to obtain one four of their number have lost their lives. The vote of the Committee can at most only give them two teachers, or two families, for the present. In this part of the field we have, at least, six hundred families, who are ready, and have said to us, "Come and teach us—we will do as you tell us." I was permitted, in company with Mr. Spalding, to meet the Spokans, in their own country. Many of them came to us with tears in their eyes, asking us to come and live in their country, and teach them as we were doing to the Nez Perces and Kayuses. This band certainly claims a share in our efforts, and a teacher, or one family, ought to be with them immediately. They were, when we were with them, sustaining a school of near one hundred children and adults, and a teacher, by their own exertions. At this point, it was thought best for me to return immediately to obtain more assistants in carrying on our labors. I will omit for the present, this band, and commence with those on the coast, among which missionaries and teachers are needed.

1. Bands on the Cowlits. A missionary station on the Cowlits near the mouth of the Columbia river, is of vital importance to our future operations and labors, and would justify the sending of at least two families of the five which it is in contemplation to send west of the mountains, to this point. There ought to be at least four families there. We may, however, conclude, on reaching the country, if the Board do not object, to establish a station at that river with perhaps one or two of the five families. Doct. Whitman was in favor of our establishing ourselves at this point on reaching the Columbia; we, however, thought we ought to act as near our instructions as possible, and accordingly selected our present location.

2. The next station that seems to be called for is one about two hundred miles from the mouth of the Columbia. At and near the falls, or shoots, as they are called, we find the shores of the Columbia lined almost with little native villages, the occupants of which, wretched as they are, exert a powerful influence on many of the adjoining tribes, with whom they have intercourse along the Columbia river. Could we have divided ourselves into forty families, we should have found twenty stations at once, in this vicinity.

3. We will pass the Kayuses, Nez Perces, and Spokans, and speak of the next tribes that came on the line of the Columbia.

4. The Okanagans, speaking the Flat Head language, and numbering between one and three hundred families. The disposition and character of this band resemble very much that of the Flat Head. They are situated near the mouth of Clark or Flat Head river, about 700 miles from the mouth of the Columbia. The station might be in the vicinity of Colville, one of the posts of the Hudson's Bay Company, in latitude 48°, longitude 118°. Two families would find this a delightful field for usefulness, there being a readiness on the part of the natives to receive instruction from teachers who may go among them.

5. Proceeding about one degree farther north, and in longitude 120°, is a numerous and well disposed tribe by the name of Carriers. This band numbers about 500 families, or 3,500 persons. We estimate seven persons to the family. Their language is somewhat different from that of the Flat Heads, yet they are on friendly terms with them, subsisting principally on fish and roots. They are nearly stationary, and would be quite so, whenever teachers can be sent to them. Four families would find abundant labors among these tribes.

6. About one hundred miles east of this tribe, between the waters of the Columbia and Clarke river, are the Ponderas, numbering about 150 families. This band I met on the 16th of April, and made known to them our object in

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coming to see their country. Several of the chiefs replied to me that they had heard that there were towards the rising sun good folks who loved God. They were now glad that they could see one, and that they had it in their hearts to come and do them good. "When you come to teach us," they added, "we will do as you tell us." They wanted I should tell them when we would build a house. They said they would do all they could do to help us. I said to them I could not tell when we should build a house, but was going to look farther in their country. This band speak the Flat Head language and usually go to hunt the buffalo with that tribe. The probability is that our mission to the Flat Heads will include this band, as well as the Spokans.

7. Northeast of this band, and along the western range of the Rocky Mountains, on and north of the Columbia river, is a band known by the name of Cootenas, numbering about 700 families. This band is generally on friendly terms with both the Flat Heads and the Black Feet. Their intercourse with the latter is such that a station comprising, say five or six families, in a few years might effect a reconciliation between these two deadly foes to each other, and save from war and death the last remains of that once numerous and best of tribes, the Flat Heads. Their language is somewhat different from the Flat Head as well as that of the Black Feet, though they understand both with little difficulty.

8. We come now to the Flat Heads. They are situated on Clark's river, in latitude 48°, longitude 113° or 114°. In their wanderings after buffalo they come over to the head waters of the Missouri; pass from thence to the head of Lewis' or Snake river, and thence return to Clark's river. I met them in May, and made known to them our object in coming to their country. They seemed to be overjoyed at the prospect of having some one to come and teach them. They immediately pointed out the place where they wished us to build a house, and where they wished to locate themselves. This place, however, it will not be safe at present to occupy as a station, being too much exposed to the wandering war parties of Black Feet. The delegation from this band to obtain teachers, which accompanied me on my return, were murdered on the way by a band of Sioux.

9. The next tribe coming east are the Black Feet. I had a personal conversation and acquaintance with the trader who resides among them, and also with one of their principal chiefs, a half-breed. From the latter I received many interesting facts relative to the character and disposition of this tribe, which is regarded as the most warlike and treacherous on our continent. In my conversation with this chief I made several inquiries with regard to the safety of persons travelling with these tribes; and also made known to him our object in coming to the country. He told me that a person going with their villages would be perfectly safe, and every thing he had would be treated with the utmost kindness. The trader made the same remark to me. When the chief told the people of his tribe about our coming to live with the Nez Perces and Flat Heads, they immediately told him to ask us to come and live with them and teach them. This tribe is divided into five bands, having different names. Three of these bands speak the same language. The others speak a different dialect. Two of the bands seem to be mild and disposed to remain at peace as far as they are permitted. Two of the bands came and smoked the pipe of peace with the Flat Heads, to whom they have long been inveterate enemies, while I was there. How long they will keep the peace is unknown. Eight men might, in the course of a few years, by going with these bands, effect an entire change in their warlike disposition, and render the traveling in the mountains comparatively safe. The tribe is sufficiently numerous to call for at least ten families, as soon as their country can be explored. They number, as I am told, about 3,400 families, averaging from eight to ten persons to the family or lodge. In case you cannot find any who are willing to commence the exploring of the Black-Foot country, on account of danger, I am willing to be one of two, four, six, or eight persons to go among them. Their language, from hearing it spoken, is far easier to learn than the Flat Head, and equally easy with the Nez Perces. I think, with a good measure of perseverance, any person of common capacity could acquire a knowledge of the language in one year.

10. The next tribe we met are the Eutaws. They properly belong to the Spanish or Mexican territory. They are a numerous and well disposed tribe, subsisting principally on roots and some small game, that is found extremely scarce in the country. They range south of Snake river, and in the vicinity of the

Great Salt Lake. I met a small band of them on my return to the rendezvous. Three or four families would find a pleasant and extensive field of usefulness among this tribe. They are more pacific, if possible, than the Nez Perces, and equally ready to settle upon their lands.

11. We found the Snakes and Bannecks also ready to receive religious teachers. It will be remembered that the Snakes once belonged to the eastern waters, and have been driven into, and nearly over the mountains, by the more eastern tribes.

12. I met a delegation of Crows at the rendezvous, who had come to invite the whites to come into their country. This has never been done before. I had a personal interview with the delegates, and with a white man, who has been nine years with this tribe. He gave me many interesting facts, which I must omit to mention for the present, respecting this tribe. There should be four persons sent immediately to explore the country and learn the language. Now is the most favorable time to supply them with religious teachers, before the vices of the whites become known among them. Total abstinence from all intoxicating drink, is a trait in the character of this tribe; and no device of the white man has yet been able to seduce them. They have been known to rob traders, take their goods, and destroy their liquors without permitting any one to taste them. The rows have their home along the head-waters of the Yellow-Stone river.